



UPDATE

US 321 Improvements Environmental Impact Statement
Watauga and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina
North Carolina Department of Transportation
TIP No. R-2237C

No.2 Summer '96

This newsletter is the second in a series published by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to keep the public informed about the US 321 Environmental Impact Statement Study.

THE BYPASS ALTERNATIVES STUDY IS NEARING COMPLETION

Public Invited to Second Citizens Informational Workshop

The North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) comparison of potential bypass alternatives is nearly complete. This study soon will conclude with the selection of reasonable bypass alternatives for comparison with widening US 321 in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Prior to the selection of reasonable bypass alternatives, the NCDOT will host a Citizens Informational Workshop on August 1 at the Blowing Rock School Cafeteria on Sunset Drive. The purpose of the workshop is to: 1) show citizens the potential bypass alternatives evaluated by the study team; 2) describe how the potential bypass alternatives were identified; 3) present the results of the study team's evaluation of potential bypass alternatives; and 4) answer questions and receive comments on the potential bypass alternatives and the evaluation. Comments also can be sent to the NCDOT or Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc. at the addresses on page 4.

You may come to the Workshop at any time between 5:00 and 8:00 p.m. to discuss the bypass study findings one-on-one with representatives of the study team. There will be no formal presentations. At the workshop, six sets of displays will be available for the public to review. They will address the following topics:

1. Bypass alternatives identification.

Bulletin Board

Citizens Informational Workshop

Date: August 1, 1996
Time: 5:00pm to 8:00pm
Place: Blowing Rock School Cafeteria on Sunset Drive

Come at any time between 5:00 and 8:00 and talk one-on-one with study team members.

Information Line 1-800-263-2434

John Page and Nicole Heckstall can answer your questions from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Our receptionist can add you to the newsletter mailing list.

(Leave a message on Parsons



2. Engineering and cost.
3. Traffic findings.
4. Community and cultural resource impact findings.
5. Natural resource findings.
6. What's next.

Study team members with expertise in the topic of a particular set of displays will be assigned to those displays for the entire evening.

What Happens After the Workshop?

Based on the findings of the alternatives analysis and comments from citizens and natural resource agencies, the study team will select reasonable bypass alternatives for comparison with the widening alternative in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The alternatives study and its results will be documented and included in the DEIS. Additional design refinements will be made to the reasonable bypass alternatives. Refinements to the widening alternative may be required based on the 1993 public hearing comments. The DEIS will be completed and released for public and government agency review in the summer of 1997. A public hearing will be held in the summer of 1997.

KEY FINDINGS OF BYPASS ALTERNATIVES STUDY

Ten Bypass Corridors Examined

The study team evaluated ten potential bypass alternatives (shown on the above maps). Each alternative varies in terms of the southern terminus of its bypass portion, the point at which it crosses Green Hill Road, and its relationship to the Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds. Each bypass alternative includes a bypass portion and a widening portion. The widening portion is the distance between the southern end of the study area and the southern starting point of the bypass. All of the bypass alternatives end at Opossum Hollow Road.

The following paragraphs describe the key findings of the bypass alternatives study. More specific information will be presented at the workshop.

Alternatives Selection



The following criteria were used for identifying potential bypass alternatives:

- Neither cross nor use lands from the Blue Ridge Parkway.
- Avoid concentrations of development.
- Avoid historic resources.
- Follow the natural terrain as much as possible to minimize the height of cuts and fills.
- Meet federal and state design criteria for roads of this type.
- Consider locations suggested by citizens, refining them as necessary to conform with the other criteria.

Several alternatives were suggested by local citizens and public officials. The Concerned Citizens of Blowing Rock suggested alternatives that served as the basis for alternatives A, B, C, and D. Alternatives that cross the Blue Ridge Parkway also were suggested.

None of the bypass alternatives evaluated cross the Blue Ridge Parkway because:

- Crossing the Parkway would reduce the bypass' effectiveness in attracting traffic from existing US 321.
- A surface crossing would require a deep cut in the ridge paralleling the Parkway and thus would have a substantial visual impact on the Parkway.
- A tunnel crossing would be extremely expensive. A twin-bore tunnel (two tunnels, each with two lanes) would cost approximately \$30,000 per linear foot.
- The Blue Ridge Parkway is both a public park and a historic resource. Its application for National Landmark status is pending. Federal law requires there be no other prudent and feasible alternative to use of lands from public parks and historic resources.

Opossum Hollow Road is the northern terminus for all the potential bypass alternatives because:

- There is a narrow valley at Opossum Hollow Road.



Use of that valley reduces the amount of earthwork required to build a bypass. This is the only such feature at the northern end of the study area.

- Crossing the Blue Ridge Parkway is not an option.

Engineering Findings

- Alternatives that include a bypass that leaves existing US 321 near the southern town limits of Blowing Rock (D, DG, E, and F) would cost less than alternatives whose bypass portion begins further south (A, AG, B, BG, C, and CG).
- Crossing Green Hill Road at a point just north of Green Hill (alternatives E and F) would reduce the excavation required.
- All of the alternatives would pass under Green Hill Road. There would be no connection between Green Hill Road and the bypass.

Traffic Findings

One of the objectives of improving US 321 is to improve traffic flow.

- Congestion would occur on any remaining two-lane section of US 321 south of Blowing Rock because of steep grades. This effect would be less if the southern end of the bypass were close to Blowing Rock, as with alternatives D, DG, E, and F.
- Acceptable traffic flow would occur on the bypass and on existing US 321 in Blowing Rock with any bypass alternative. Peak hour congestion would begin to occur in the year 2020 on existing US 321 north of Sunset Drive.
- High accident rates would remain where no improvements are made to existing US 321. This effect is less when the south end of the bypass is close to Blowing Rock, like alternatives D, DG, E, and F.
- When it takes less time to use the bypass than to stay on the existing road, local trips would use the bypass to travel to businesses in Blowing Rock, such as the Food Lion.

Potential for Community, Cultural Resource, and



Visual Impacts

- Effects on communities in Caldwell County would be less with alternatives D, DG, E, and F. All alternatives, however, would follow ridges in Caldwell County and avoid valley communities. Development along ridges would be affected.
- All alternatives would displace homes and introduce through traffic to communities along Green Hill Road, but those affected and the extent of the effect would differ among the alternatives.
- A bypass between the Assembly Grounds' buildings and the Parkway (A, B, C, D, and F) would have greater impacts on the activities at the Assembly Grounds than other bypass alternatives.
- None of the alternatives would affect the Green Park Historic District or the Blowing Rock Country Club.
- None of the alternatives would use lands belonging to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Changes in views from the Blue Ridge Parkway would be minimized with alternatives E and F.

Potential for Natural Resource Impacts

- Loss of undisturbed wildlife habitat, fragmentation of habitat and stream crossings would be minimized by shorter bypasses.
- Alternatives E and F are the only ones that would displace wetlands, but the loss would be small.





CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

Citizens Advisory Committee Update

The Citizens Advisory Committee, introduced in the last newsletter, has been active throughout the alternatives analysis phase of the study. The 13-member group has met with the study team three times to date and will meet twice more during this phase of the study. Meeting topics have included study issues, alternatives selection criteria, alternatives design, potential impacts, and traffic volumes and flow.

Since the publication of the last newsletter, a new member, Kevin J. Watson, was added to represent the communities of Blackberry and Bailey Camp. Also, Don Holycross replaced J. Owen Tolbert as the Town of Blowing Rock representative.

The committee will continue to meet with the study team throughout preparation of the DEIS.

Your Continued Participation in the Planning Process is Encouraged

If you have any questions, please call John Page on our **toll-free project information line**, 1-800-263-2434.

You may also **write the study team** at:

Mr. John Page, Project Manager
Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.
991 Aviation Parkway, Suite 500
Morrisville, NC 27560,

or

Mr. H. Franklin Vick, PE Manager,
Planning and Environmental Branch
NC Department of Transportation
PO Box 25201
Raleigh, NC 27611-5201

If you have not already done so, please call the information line or write and ask to be added to our newsletter mailing list.

Community groups can arrange a small group meeting with the study team. Smaller groups should consider combining to hold a joint meeting. The organization(s) sponsoring each meeting will be responsible for arranging a meeting site and notifying participants.



Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.

991 Aviation Parkway, Suite 500
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